



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701

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NOAA SEEKING PUBLIC COMMENT ON GULF OF MEXICO RED SNAPPER AND SHRIMP AMENDMENTS TO BE REVIEWED BY SECRETARY OF COMMERCE

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries Service) is seeking public comment on the joint amendments for Gulf of Mexico red snapper (Reef Fish Amendment 27) and shrimp (Amendment 14) submitted by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) for review, approval, and implementation by the Secretary of Commerce (The Secretary). The [Notice of Availability](#) for public comment on this joint amendment published in the Federal Register July 26, 2007.

Please Note: A proposed rule that would implement measures outlined in joint Amendment 27/14 has also been received from the Council. In accordance with the Magnuson-Stevens Act, NOAA Fisheries Service is evaluating the proposed rule to determine whether it is consistent with the FMPs, the Magnuson-Stevens Act, and other applicable law. If that determination is affirmative, NOAA Fisheries Service will publish the proposed rule in the *Federal Register* for public review and comment. NOAA Fisheries Service will also announce this request for comment through the release of another Southeast Fishery Bulletin.

Purpose of the Joint Amendment 27/14

Joint amendment 27/14 proposes actions to reduce the red snapper catch, bycatch, and discard mortality in the directed commercial and recreational fisheries and the shrimp fishery. The intended effect of joint Amendment 27/14 is to end overfishing for red snapper by 2010 and rebuild the stock by 2032 in compliance with the red snapper rebuilding plan.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) requires each Regional Fishery Management Council to submit any fishery management plan or amendment to NOAA Fisheries Service for review and approval, disapproval, or partial approval. The Magnuson-Stevens Act also requires NOAA Fisheries Service to publish an

announcement in the *Federal Register* notifying the public that the plan or amendment is available for review and comment.

Elements of Joint Amendment 27/14

Elements of Amendment 27/14 constitute a revised rebuilding plan that has at least a 50-percent probability of rebuilding the red snapper stock by 2032. Actions in Amendment 27/14 include:

- Total allowable catch would be reduced to 5.0 million pounds (MP), with a commercial quota of 2.55 MP and a recreational quota of 2.45 MP.
- To help constrain the recreational harvest to the new quota, recreational bag limits would be reduced from four fish to two fish; the bag limit for captains and crews of for-hire vessels would be set at zero, and the recreational fishing season would be shortened. The 16-inch total length minimum size limit for recreational fishermen would stay the same.
- The commercial minimum size limit would be reduced to 13 inches total length with the intent of reducing regulatory discards.
- To reduce discard mortality in the directed fisheries, Amendment 27/14 would require the use of venting tools, dehooking devices, and non-stainless steel circle hooks (when using natural baits) for all reef fish fishery sectors.
- Shrimp effort, and the associated bycatch discard mortality of juvenile red snapper, would be controlled through time-area closures to reduce red snapper mortality 74 percent from the 2001-2003 time period. This reduction could be relaxed in the future as red snapper rebuild.

A final determination on the length of the recreational fishing season will be based on a number of factors. The proposed two-fish bag limit alone would allow a June 1 through September 15 (107 days) recreational fishing season. In addition to the two-fish bag limit, constraining the captain and crew of for-hire vessels to a

zero-fish bag limit would allow the fishing season to be extended through the end of September (122 days). Based on extensive public comment, the Council chose to assume a 10-percent reduction in post-hurricane fishing effort and landings when evaluating recreational management measures. Application of this assumption along with implementation of a two-fish bag limit and zero-bag limit for captain and crew of for-hire vessels would allow the recreational fishing season to extend from May 15 through October 15 (154 days). This assumption is controversial because although preliminary data suggest some declines in effort have occurred since the 2005 hurricane season, the magnitude of reductions vary by fishing sector, are often less than 10 percent, and in some cases effort and landings have increased. Further, it is unknown how long post-hurricane reductions in landings and fishing effort may continue as the fisheries recover. Therefore, NOAA Fisheries Service is specifically requesting comments on the proposed action to assume a 10-percent reduction in post-hurricane fishing effort, which would affect the designation of the length of the recreational fishing season.

DATES: Written comments must be received no later than 5 p.m., eastern time, on September 24, 2007.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments by any of the following methods:

- E-mail: 0648-AT87.NOA27-14@noaa.gov. Include in the subject line the following document identifier: 0648-AT87-NOA27-14.
- Federal e-Rulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments.

- Mail: Peter Hood, Southeast Regional Office, NMFS, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701.
- Fax: 727-824-5308, Attention: Peter Hood.

Copies of joint Amendment 27/14, which includes an Environmental Impact Statement, a Regulatory Impact Review, and an Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis, are available in electronic format from the Council's web site at <http://www.gulfcouncil.org>, or by contacting the Council at 2203 North Lois Avenue, Suite 1100, Tampa, FL, 33607; phone: 813-348-1630; fax: 813-348-1711; e-mail: gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org.

Comments received by September 24, 2007, whether specifically directed to the amendment or the proposed rule, will be considered by NOAA Fisheries Service in its decision to approve, disapprove, or partially approve the amendment. Comments received after that date will not be considered by NOAA Fisheries Service in this decision. All comments received by NOAA Fisheries Service on the amendment or the proposed rule during their respective comment periods will be addressed in the final rule.

How Can We Improve These Fishery Bulletins?

If you have any suggestions on how we may improve the contents of future fishery bulletins please contact:
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